“We asked for workers, but human beings came”: Mental health and well-being of Polish migrants in Northern Ireland

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POLISH MIGRANTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND
ACCORDING TO CENSUS 2011
MIGRATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

• Migrants as workers; migrants as human beings

• The relationship between migration and mental health is an important public health challenge
Preliminary data

• 17 purposive interviews

• 9 with key professionals in regular contact with Polish migrants (with mental health problems)

• 8 with Polish migrants

• Location: Belfast, Newry&Mourne, Portadown, Craigavon, Ballymena
MAIN FINDINGS: Social isolation

- Limited social ties in Poland
- Lack of strong social networks in NI
- Migration as a strain on relationships:
  - Lack of childcare
  - Lack of quality-time for couples
  - Shift in gender roles - change of family dynamics
MAIN FINDINGS: Language barrier

- Difficulty engaging fully within ‘the receiving society’
- Barriers to accessing local mental health services and practitioners
- Inability to speak about feelings and emotions in English
- Lack of Polish workers in mental health charities
- Problem recognising qualifications of Polish psychologists
- Issues with interpreting services
MAIN FINDINGS: Work situation

- The effects of downward mobility and underemployment
- Work in monotonous jobs in dirty and unpleasant environments
- Long working hours
- Many Polish migrants were actively recruited by NI employers
- Effects of the economic downturn
MAIN FINDINGS: Cultural differences

- Differences in...
  - perception of and reference to mental health
  - perception of the health system in the receiving country and the country of origin
  - paths of bereavement
OTHER FINDINGS:

• Addictions
• High number of suicides
• High level of common mental disorders
• Domestic violence
• ‘Poorly planned migration’
• Impact of migration on children
PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

- Engage Polish migrants in activities outside work
- Engage Polish volunteers in mental health charities
- Improve training for Polish interpreters
- Translate information booklets
- Prepare ‘welcome packs’
- Expand ‘Cultural awareness guidelines’ for HSC staff
- Information campaign among Polish migrants
POSITIVE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

• Escaping poverty
• Escaping family control
• Discovering new talents (e.g. sports, music)
• Occupational and professional development
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